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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3823
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1073
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RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 1127
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2980
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 7757
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5417
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0242
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000841

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: DEFENSE SECRETARY CRITICIZES
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY FOR "BULLYING"

REF: A. COLOMBO 809
[1](#)B. COLOMBO 820
[1](#)C. COLOMBO 824

Classified By: DCM JAMES R. MOORE. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa, in an interview with Reuters and BBC correspondents, accused the international community, particularly the UK, of "bullying" Sri Lanka over human rights. He maintained that in fighting terrorism "anything is fair." He also charged that the Tamil Tigers had infiltrated UN agencies in Sri Lanka, working as local employees. The British High Commission and the UN responded, saying that Rajapaksa's allegations were unfounded. The UN spokesperson expressed concern that the Defense Secretary's comments could compromise the safety and security of UN local staff. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) In an interview given to local Reuters and BBC correspondents, Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa took the international community to task for being too tough with Sri Lanka on human rights. "This is discrimination and bullying by the international community," Rajapaksa told the journalists. "Without understanding the problem, they are trying to bully us, and we won't be isolated. We have all the SAARC countries, the Asian countries... Britain or Western countries, EU countries, they can do whatever. We don't depend on them. They think that we get aid. No, they are not giving anything."

[1](#)3. (U) Gothabaya defended the recent attempt to remove several hundred Tamils from the capital. (Note: the Sri Lankan Supreme Court issued a temporary stay against the action, allowing at least some of the Tamils to return to Colombo.) "It is a good example where the whole world was misled," Rajapaksa said. "Everyone knows the LTTE is infiltrating... We can't arrest 300 people and detain them. What is the best option?... We have to do search operations and when we arrest suspicious people... you don't know who is who," Gothabaya said. "So you can tell them, if you don't have any legal business in Colombo... we don't want to detain

you, you go back to your homes. In fact this operation was much better. We could have put all of them in detention." Gothabaya continued: "We have to defend ourselves. You can't risk the country. What I am saying is, if there is a terrorist group, why can't you do anything? It's not against a community. I'm talking about terrorists. Anything is fair." The Defense Secretary also condemned what he called "double standards". "All the militaries do covert operations," he said. "When the U.S. does operations they say covert operations. When something is in Sri Lanka, they call it abductions. This is playing with words."

¶4. (SBU) Rajapaksa said British Foreign Office Minister Kim Howells, who visited the island on June 11, was "completely misinformed. Howells didn't talk a single word against LTTE, a single word against terrorism. They are threatening isolation, they are stopping aid... They want us to suffer. When America is attacked... every country (calls it) war against terrorism, but why are the terrorists being treated in a different way in Sri Lanka? Is Britain talking about isolating America?" British High Commission spokesman John Culley refuted the Defense Secretary's allegation of bullying. "We want to work with the government of Sri Lanka," a spokesman said. "There is no question of bullying or double standards, but the situation in the country is deteriorating. The international community is worried about the negative trend of developments in Sri Lanka, particularly in human rights, and we are making this clear."

¶5. (U) Gothabaya alleged that the LTTE had infiltrated operatives into UN agencies over the past three decades. "For 30 years or so the LTTE planned this, they infiltrated

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the UN. The problem is the UN organizations, they took a lot of locals." Orla Clinton, the spokesperson for the UN resident representative in Colombo, said there were no grounds for Mr. Rajapaksa's statements. "In light of the recent attacks on aid workers in the country, our concern is for the safety and security of all our staff, particularly nationals who are the backbone of our operations. Negative statements can directly impact upon their safety."

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Gothabaya's outburst appears born out of frustration at the checking of his effort to clear Colombo of transient Tamils by the Supreme Court, political parties, and civil society. According to one of the journalists present, in further remarks not included in the media stories, Gothabaya appeared to exempt the U.S. from the category of countries who are "bullying" Sri Lanka, saying that the U.S. helps Sri Lanka. Embassy notes that the temporary stay by the Supreme Court may be revisited. The Sri Lankan government is deeply split over the issue of clearing Tamils from low-budget hostels and lodges in the capital. It is possible that hardliners in the administration, including Gothabaya, will make another attempt to correct the legal defects in their action and institute their policy. As last week's reaction show, the political fallout of such a move would be considerable. According to our contacts in the ruling party, there are a significant number of MPs and ministers in the government ranks who are not prepared to support such measures under any circumstances.
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